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Representative
MARY DYE

Representative
JOE SCHMICK

• 9th District • 2016 Session Review

Serving Adams, Asotin, Garfield and Whitman counties, and north Franklin and south Spokane counties

Spring 2016

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Dear Friends,

The Legislature has completed its work for the year. It took more time than we had hoped, because some lawmakers wanted to go back to the old days when they didn't have to think long-term when making spending choices. In the end, however, the Senate and House of Representatives reached agreement on a set of sensible budget adjustments, to go with the other important decisions we had already made.

The budget update does not raise taxes; it preserves the popular college-tuition reduction we approved in 2015 while providing more support for mental-health treatment. We protected voter-approved public charter schools, which had been threatened by a state Supreme Court ruling, and kept the Legislature on track to complete reforms to Washington's K-12 education system in line with another high-court ruling.

Please keep reading for details about what all of this means to you and your family. Now that the 2016 session is over, we hope to see you in the coming months as we travel around the many communities that make up the 9th District.

If you have questions or concerns to share with us, please call, send an e-mail or write a letter using the contact information and our legislative website addresses on this page. We are always glad to hear from you, and welcome your comments and ideas.

Sincerely,


Mark Schoesler
State Senator


Mary Dye
State Representative


Joe Schmick
State Representative



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Budget update approved without tax increases

People in the 9th District understand the importance of living within their means. We take that same approach when it comes to state government, as shown by this year's work on the state operating budget.

It is customary to reopen the two-year budget at the midway point (this year), to make revisions based on information that wasn't at hand a year earlier, or respond to emerging situations.

We supported a true "supplemental" budget – one that keeps changes to a minimum and balances within the available revenue. However, Democrat leaders in the House proposed so much new policy and spending that new taxes would be needed. They forced the Legislature into an overtime period that lasted nearly three weeks (last year it was 10 weeks of overtime, for the same reason!), but fortunately, the taxpayers ultimately prevailed.

The budget supplement we adopted features:

- Funding to cover higher-than-usual wildfire-fighting costs from 2015 and support for a policy shift toward preventing wildfires, through thinning and prescribed fires
- Better care of our state's most vulnerable, through improvements to the state-run mental-health facility west of the Cascades (Western State Hospital), and more home visits to look after people with developmental disabilities
- More support for homecare workers, combined with taxpayer protections
- Preservation of tuition cuts for 2016-17 school year

Higher taxes should be a last resort for balancing a budget. We will continue working to eliminate government waste and protect families and employers from needless tax increases.

We also reopened the transportation and capital budgets adopted in 2015. Some reprioritizing within

the transportation budget will allow for some additional work. Changes to the capital budget will: invest even more toward building classrooms, in support of reducing class sizes in grades K-3; provide more mental-health treatment beds in communities; and preserve funding for environmental-cleanup projects that return polluted land to productive uses.

Balanced-budget law protecting taxpayers

It was a great help during budget negotiations to have the law on our side – specifically, Washington's unique four-year balanced-budget law. Before that law was created in 2012, legislators could increase spending in a budget (to appease interest groups before an election, for example) without caring whether it would create a deficit down the road. Or they could adopt new policies without funding them, knowing those policies would have to be included in the next two-year budget. Either approach was a recipe for spending cuts or tax increases (sometimes both).

Budget writers now have no choice but to account for the long-term effects of their spending decisions, and that has brought a new level of stability to the budget. Some Democrat leaders tried to ignore the balanced-budget law this year and pile on the



Rep. Schmick is in his second year as vice chair of the House Republican Caucus.

spending; had we not resisted that, it could have caused a shortfall next year and assisted a push for a state income tax. Ultimately, the other side gave in and agreed to a budget that balances through the rest of its two-year cycle and for the two years after that, just as the law requires.

2016 Session Review

Continuing our commitment to education

Providing for education is the Legislature's number-one constitutional duty. In recent years Republican legislators have led the way to restoring K-12 education to its rightful place. For decades, the other side had been more focused on non-education spending. That had a lot to do with why the state Supreme Court stepped in (through its ruling in *McCleary v. State of Washington*) to order changes in school funding.

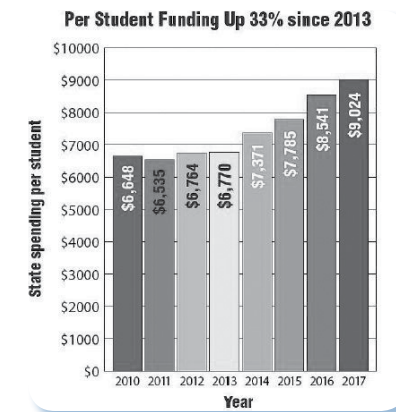
In recent budgets we have addressed how much money goes to schools, adding billions of dollars to the K-12 part of the budget. Public schools now account for over 47% of the budget, more than any other program or service. Now the emphasis is on how schools are funded, meaning state dollars versus local dollars generated by school levies.

It is a complicated issue – Washington has 295 school districts, and there is no one limit on the level of tax they may levy with voter approval. On top of that, districts use locally-generated dollars for different things, some of which fall into the category of “basic education” that the state is

Public charter schools are back on firm financial footing

In September 2015 the state Supreme Court surprised many with its ruling on a lawsuit challenging the state's public charter-school law, approved by voters in 2012. The justices declared the law was unconstitutional, in that public charter schools were not entitled to receive funding from the same fund as traditional public schools. The court's reasoning seemed like a stretch, but to keep the state's charter schools open, the Legislature needed to come up with a different funding source this year. We did.

We recognize many in traditional K-12 education have concerns about



supposed to fund.

We are on track to agree in 2017 on reforms to keep local-levy dollars from paying for things defined as basic education. Our approach is laid out in the law created this year by **Senate Bill 6195**. It addresses the many variables to consider, from staff salaries and health benefits to local collective bargaining. This should also help with recruiting teachers and ensuring the proper use of local levy funds. A lot of research still needs to be done between now and 2017, and the new law keeps a bipartisan group of legislators in place to review the data and make recommendations.

non-traditional schools; at the same time, however, a traditional school simply does not work for every student. Our focus should be first and foremost on providing parents with options that can lead to successful educational outcomes for their children.

Already, eight public charter schools in our state are educating more than 1,000 children from Seattle to Spokane. For many families, a charter school is a welcome alternative to a low-performing traditional school. We favor keeping this option open for families and are pleased an agreement to do so was reached.

Tuition cuts preserved

When Governor Inslee proudly announced at a recent meeting of the nation's governors that his state was the only one to cut tuition, do you suppose he admitted to having opposed the idea?

Democrat legislators also like to take credit for the historic tuition cuts, even though many balked as Inslee did (and wanted to raise tuition again, following the tuition freeze we instituted for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years).

We made sure the supplemental operating budget approved this year maintained the extra funding for state-run colleges and universities that made the tuition cuts possible in the first place. If the point of providing so much money for K-12 education is to prepare high school students to graduate, ready for careers and college, then an education at a public college in our state needs to be affordable.

Between the tuition cuts and tying future tuition levels to the state's average wage, we are finally bringing stability and predictability to the cost of a college education. That's good for students and their families.

Two-year savings from tuition cuts:

 HUSKIES	\$2,094	 UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON	\$1,690
 UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO	\$2,016	 CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY	\$1,686
 UNIVERSITY OF OREGON	\$1,746	 EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY	\$1,574

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Rep. Dye sees first bill passed

Success – a bill that passed:

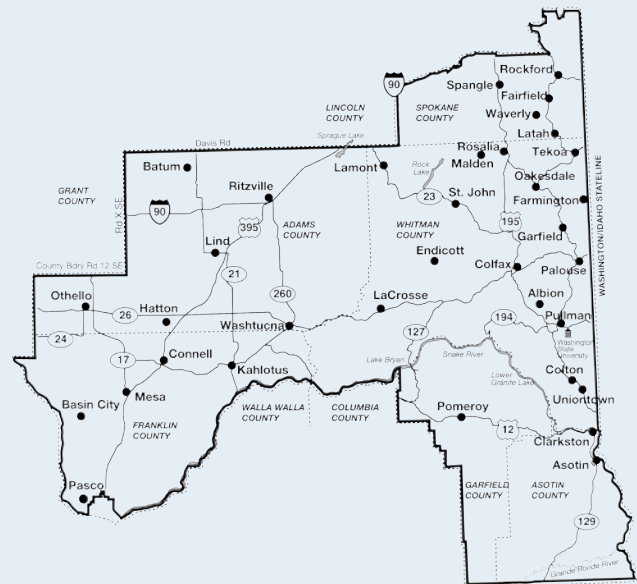
As a freshman legislator it was an honor to have one of my bills pass during the 2016 session. **House Bill 2807** (being signed, in the photo) means the heavy-haul corridor in Lewiston, Idaho will now extend into our state, which will be beneficial for facilitating movement of agricultural goods and commodities to our ports. My bill harmonizes weight limits between the two states which will facilitate the movement of heavy equipment being shipped through our river system. We have seen extensive growth in our port areas, so having this designation on some of our 9th District roadways will serve as an essential component for economic development in Eastern Washington. I thank the Port of Whitman County for its efforts and support throughout the process of passing this important bill. This new law will take effect Jan. 1, 2017.

Maybe next session – a bill that didn't quite make it:

Many wildfires can't be contained early because of a lack of access or certainty of resources. Unfortunately, suppression assets are a larger tool than many small, rural districts have in their toolboxes. My legislation, **House Bill 2596**, would have created and funded a Local Wildland Fire Suppression Account to be managed by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR). It would fund immediate, local fire-suppression responses by local suppression entities, automatically deploying larger assets when an emergency exceeds the local resources available. I will continue to work hard in the coming months with DNR, local jurisdictions and other stakeholders so the bill may be successfully reintroduced in the 2017 session.

Need a guest speaker?

If you belong to a club, civic group or community-service organization and would like a guest speaker at your next meeting or event, please contact our offices to arrange a convenient date. We're happy to report on the issues we dealt with during the 2016 session, or we can tailor our remarks to address particular areas of interest or concern.



Election-year restrictions

We want you to know what is happening in Olympia, and how it affects you. However, because each of us is seeking re-election later this year, state law (created by Initiative 134, in 1992) limits what and when we can mail to you. After this newsletter, the soonest we can mail another is just before the 2017 session.

The law **does permit** us to respond to your direct requests for information, and we encourage you to write or call whenever you have a question or a comment to share on legislation or other matters.

Mark, Mary & Joe

2016 Session Review

HOLDING STATE AGENCIES AND OFFICIALS ACCOUNTABLE

While legislators have a crucial role in providing for the operation of state government, through the budgeting process, we also owe it to the people we serve to investigate and correct problems involving how tax dollars are being used – and the proper operation of government in general.

This year we addressed more concerns than usual involving the performance of elected officials, appointed agency heads and bureaucrats in the executive branch.

Dangerous felons released from custody too soon

The Department of Corrections (DOC) confessed to releasing dangerous felons prematurely from 2002 through 2015, supposedly because a computer program was miscalculating time off for good behavior. Amazingly, this continued even after the problem became known in 2012! The number of felons turned loose too soon could be as many as 3,700 – and we know at least two Washington residents are dead as a result. A \$5 million lawsuit has been filed in connection with one of those deaths, of a 17-year-old Spokane boy.

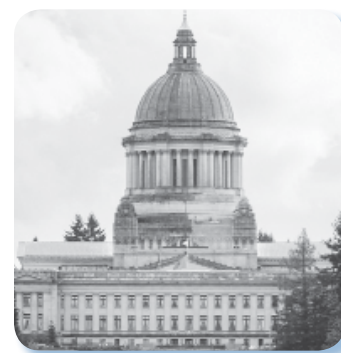


As majority leader of the Senate, Sen. Schoesler has sharpened the Legislature's focus on accountability.

The Senate conducted a thorough investigation, which included the rare use of its power to issue subpoenas to witnesses. While the private investigation by the governor's office tended to put the blame on middle managers, the public testimony we received pointed at the corrections secretary appointed by the governor. Considering the DOC has been at the center of nearly \$39 million in lawsuit-settlement costs since 2012 alone, it is important to find the truth in hopes of preventing similarly disgraceful (and costly) mismanagement in the future.

Impeach the state auditor

The House of Representatives was considering a vote on impeaching the state auditor, a former House member, who was indicted by a federal grand jury just as the regular legislative session was ending in 2015. The idea was dropped because impeachment proceedings could have conflicted with his federal trial on charges that include money laundering and possession of stolen property, all tied to the private business he owned before being elected auditor in 2012.



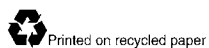
Transportation secretary ousted

If the Senate votes against confirming someone the governor has appointed, it is effectively a termination. For that reason, our state transportation department is no longer headed by someone whose state-agency experience was limited to five years as a level-1 engineer in Wisconsin 20 years before Governor Inslee plucked her from Oregon – someone who wouldn't even become a Washington resident!

The Senate vote to oust the transportation secretary was controversial, but there have been too many major blunders stemming from the headquarters level to trust that the same administration would efficiently manage the multibillion-dollar package of transportation projects approved by the Legislature in 2015.

If the governor won't hold his own agencies accountable, someone else has to.

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